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### Do you still dream of horses?

Peter Blakemore

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Do You Still Dream of Horses?

By

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B.A., University of Iowa, 1981

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Montana

1988

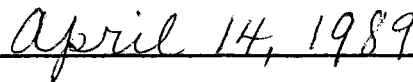
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## When a Boy Needs a Horse

His father was doing the drinking, putting ice-cubes in a glass and pouring from one of the bottles in the living room that Albert wasn't allowed to touch. There were some in the television room too and he couldn't touch them either, especially not the Uncle Jack bourbon. After a party once, when his father came back from driving the sitter home, Albert had seen him go to the booze and say, "Shit, that sitter's been at the Jack Daniels." "Come on, Walt," his mother had said, "It's right where it was when we left." "Bull," said his father. "She's nipping off my bourbon. She can have any of the rest of the crap, as long as she doesn't touch the Uncle Jack." Albert figured it was worse for him to touch that than it was the snowblower in the garage and he had been spanked pretty hard once just for putting his foot on the snowblower. He never did touch the booze. He had touched the snowblower again a few times when his father was at work and his mother was inside playing with his little sister. He'd

been trying to get it to make a lot of noise the way his father did, but he couldn't. He'd have to wait until the snow came. Then, when his mother brought his father home from the train, his father would go out and blow it off the driveway and stamp his boots on the doorstep and come back in for the booze.

His father put some more ice in the glass and went to lay down on the couch. He saw Albert in the hall.

"How come I didn't get to meet you at the train?" Albert asked.

"Dad's not feeling so hot today, son. I came home early."

He drank some of the booze.

"Do you have a cold?"

"No. I don't know what I have, maybe the flu. Remember when you had the flu last year?"

He did remember that. It was when he felt dizzy. At gym in school, he threw up on his pants and had to leave. When he got home, his mother ran after him, saying, "Stay away from your sister. She'll get your flu." They made a bed out of the couch in the television room and his mother made him drink orange juice and apple juice. She said that was good for a flu.

"Is booze good for a flu?" Albert asked his father.

"Maybe you better go work on your chemistry set,



Alby. If I have the flu I don't want you to get it, okay?"

His chemistry set was in the basement and he didn't like going down there. If his sister found out he was in the basement, she'd turn off the lights from the top of the stairs. That was the only switch and there weren't any windows so you had to go to the wall and feel your way around to the stairs. Also, when he did the chemistry, he could never remember what he'd done. On the cover of the box the set came in, next to the face of the boy holding up a tube, it said "For ages 9 through 13" and Albert had just turned eight. He was glad that his father thought of him as older, but he didn't really understand why a person would want to play with a chemistry set. He had never been as excited as the boy on the cover of the box. You just looked at the names the book said and spooned the powders together into the glass tube, then mixed in water or the acid until colors or bubbles or smoke happened. Usually, his father came down and asked him, "What did you do, Alby?" but he could never say. "When you do something, write it down." he'd tell Albert, but somehow he always forgot and by then it didn't matter because whatever had happened had happened.

There was another reason why he didn't like the basement. Up by the ceiling near his chemistry set, there was a hole the size of a grocery box in the wall. His

mother told him that was under the place where they added on to the kitchen when he was still a baby. She drew a line with her foot on the kitchen floor to show how small it had been. She waved her hand behind her and said, "The rest of this wasn't even here when you were born." Once he got a flashlight from the garage and brought it downstairs and moved the chair over to look in. He could see that the floor was higher in the hole, but whenever he moved the flashlight he couldn't see anyplace but the small circle at the end of it. That made him think there was something running around in there where he wasn't shining the light. Something could be moving in there that he couldn't see. When he asked his father what was in the hole, his father said, "Ghosts, Alby," then talked like a ghost and picked Albert up and started to put him in the hole. He went "woo-oo, wooo-ooo," a sound like the wind, and laughed and put Albert back on his feet. After that, Albert didn't go down in the basement unless his father made him work on his chemistry set.

Albert went down the hall to the kitchen. His little sister was kneeling on a stool at the counter. She was squeezing Elmer's glue onto a piece of paper from her art pad. His mother was bending over her, smoking and making comments. She put her cigarette in an ashtray and went to the oven.

"We're eating early tonight, honey." she said to him. "Are you hungry?"

"Not yet," he told her.

His sister turned fast to look at him. Her hair swung into her eyes and she brushed it away. She stuck out her tongue, then blew up her face. "I'm making a picture," she said. "And you're not!" She turned back and started sprinkling pink and purple stars onto the glue. Albert ran over and grabbed her hair. He pulled it, hard.

"Mom!" she screamed and swung at him with the glue bottle.

The picture flew off the counter and landed face down on the floor. Stars floated and twinkled after it. He felt his mother grab his shoulders. "Damn it, Albert," she shouted. She turned him around and shook him. "Why can't you leave your sister alone? Why did you have to do that?"

"What the hell's going on in there?" his father called from the living room.

Albert ran to the back door and out into the yard. He went straight to the tree where his father had built him the space capsule that said "APOLLO V" on the side of it. As fast as he could, he climbed the rope ladder, pulled it up after him and closed the hatch. He looked out the window his father called a portal. For a long

time nobody came. When he felt pretty sure no one was coming, he opened the hatch and swung his legs in the air.

Albert looked behind him at all the of the circles with numbers and arrows painted in them. They looked like clocks but they never changed the way a clock did.

"That's the instrument panel," his father had said. "When you start to take off, all of the dials, altimeter, velocity, thrust," his father had tapped them, one, two, three, "all of them will start to move." That was what his father told him, but it wasn't true, he knew it. Paint was cracked and peeling off one of the instruments. He picked at a chip and found wood underneath. Except for the nails that you could see coming through the bottom when you stood on the ground, the whole thing was made of wood. A car was made of metal. When you put your hand on metal, it slid along. When you put your hand on wood, you had to move it and you might get a splinter when you did. The space ship was just like the house. You could make it bigger, make more out of it, the way they had the kitchen, but that wouldn't make it move. A car moved and a rocketship moved--he had seen that on TV. But he also knew what a treehouse was--his friend Jimmy Elkind from down the street had a treehouse and that was all his spaceship was, a treehouse that looked a little like the top of a rocket. It would never move and he knew it.

Albert kicked his legs hanging down through the hatch. One of his shoelaces was untied and he stopped kicking the other foot to watch the one with the shoelace. If he stopped, the shoelace kept going, and if he went side to side, the shoelace went in a circle. If he stopped, it still went in a circle. Then he watched the ground. He moved his head up and down and the ground went up and down.

He remembered last summer when they went in an airplane to Grandma Grace's in Iowa. Albert's father made him sit by the window. "Now watch when we go up." he said. At first, Albert couldn't see anything, just the usual sky. Then he started falling toward the window and his father said, "Look, Alby. There's Long Island Sound." He was pointing and moving his finger in front of Albert's face. "Can you see the sailboats?" his father asked. "Yeah," he said, even though he couldn't really. Still, he knew that he was looking at the sound because his father had given him a book full of pictures taken from airplanes and spaceships. He knew that things changed from far away, like when you were riding your bike to school. The first time you saw the building, it was small enough to cover with your thumb. The closer you came, the bigger the school got, until you were at the door and couldn't see the whole building anymore. Inside, you

couldn't see the building at all, you had to look out a window and then you could see only a corner of it.

In the airplane his father had tapped the window.

"That's where we live, way over there, that's Connecticut. Do you see it?"

This time Albert shook his head and said, "No."

"Look down my finger." his father said. "Back that way. Now do you see it?"

"I can't see it."

"Oh, nonsense," said his father, and he took the back of Albert's neck and moved his head up to the finger pressed against the window. "Do you see the cove now? You can't see our house, but do you see Mianus Point and the beach?"

"No," said Albert.

"Look, just look," he said, squeezing Albert's neck. "See the way the way the shore curves around? See the waves coming up? Quick, we're turning. Look, Albert, look!"

"Oh, yeah," Albert said. "I see it."

"You can tell where we live by the shoreline. See, there's the point where we went fishing last month."

"Yeah," he said. "And there's Ata's."

Ata was the old woman who ran the store in the small house by the railroad station. She sold candy and soda pop and newspapers, and she smoked all day and coughed,

and when you came in with a quarter, she looked at you, frowned, and walked around behind the glass case full of candy. You clicked your money up on the counter and chose candy until Ata told you you had to stop.

"What did you say?" asked his father.

"I can see Ata's." said Albert.

"You can't see Ata's." He clicked his tongue and shook his head. "We're too high up, and anyway, we're going over the city now so just forget it...Ata's."

Grandma Grace lived right in the middle of the map of North America his father had put on the wall of his bedroom. It was so far from Mianus that they couldn't see her very often. His other grandmother lived in Brooklyn and when his mother tried to show him where that was on the map, her fingertip covered both Brooklyn and Mianus. When she took her finger away there was only a black dot with "New York" written next to it.

They saw Grandma Feeney in Brooklyn all the time. Her house was on a street without any yards. His father parked the car next to the sidewalk and Grandma Feeney's porch was right there. It looked just like the house next to it and the house next to it was so close that in the summer, when the windows were open and you heard noises in the kitchen, you couldn't tell if the noises were in Grandma Feeney's kitchen or the neighbor's. If both houses sat down to eat at the same time, Grandma Feeney

closed the curtains because the neighbors would look in and it felt like eating in a restaurant.

Grandma Feeney had hair that was very thin, so that you could see through it all the way down to her skin, and when the light hit it a certain way, her hair turned blue. If she turned her head, her glasses made one eye seem bigger than it really was, too big to fit on her face. Albert would look at the eye and see on the edge of it a spot the color of skim milk. And she also had bad breath and liked to have Albert sit on her lap or on the arm of her chair while she whispered questions to him. It was worse when she came to see them in Mianus. He'd rather go see her in Brooklyn because her house had a funny smell, a little like her breath, and then when she whispered, "Did you go to church today?" he didn't mind so much. The smell was already in his nose and he was used to it.

Albert's father hated to go to Brooklyn. On the way, he'd call the other people in their cars "insane" and he'd roll down the window and shout "You bastard," at the trucks as he gunned the engine past them. He'd shake his head and say, "This is the last time we do this." and smoke cigarettes until Albert's mother put her hand on his shoulder. "Do you want me to drive, Walt?" she'd ask, then he'd stop yelling for a while and just drive and smoke.



To get to Grandma Grace's house you had to go first to the LaGuardia Airport, then fly to Omaha, rent a car and drive across the river into Iowa and down the map. Driving over the big river, his father would sing the song "Across the Wide Missouri," which seemed to have only a few words that you were supposed to sing again and again. Pretty soon, there were cows everywhere and horses and farmers in tractors that his father would honk the horn at and wave to. Then the road became a small road, went into trees along the side of little rivers and up to the tops of hills from which you could see everything. The sky and long clouds were around you in every direction and Albert saw barns and houses from so far away that it was like being in the airplane. His mother would let his sister into the front seat and she'd put a hand on her shoulder and point to things, telling her what they were.

"Look, Ellen. Look at the moo-cows," she'd say.  
"That's where milk and ice cream comes from."

"No. Steaks," his father would say. "Those are angus."

Finally, they'd come to the last little river, which his father had another song for, and a minute later they were driving through Nodaway to Grandma Grace's.

She lived on the south edge of town, in a house with nothing but fields behind it. In front of her place was a regular hard road with grass growing up through the cracks

and if you went barefoot on that road in the summertime it burned your feet. But the hard road turned the corner of Grandma Grace's yard and at her driveway it stopped and became soft dirt that went on out through the fields. Last summer, when they pulled into her driveway, there was a pony tied to a tree.

The pony kept its head down in the shade, nuzzling and chewing hay that had been spread there. Albert jumped out of the car and ran toward the pony. It looked up at him and he stopped. A moment later, Grandma Grace was there with her arm on his back and she kissed him and said she loved him and called him "Sweety," then took him over to the pony and put his hand on its neck. It was smooth under his hand. His hand moved over the pony's neck without having to make it move.

"His name is Henry," his grandmother said. "Do you want to ride him?"

She helped him into the saddle, showed him in the yard how to make Henry go, stop, and turn. Then she led them out to where the road turned soft and said, "Ride slow and come back when you get to the first mailbox."

Albert couldn't even see the first mailbox. It was on the other side of a hill. Still, he went slow to make the ride longer. He rode with his right hand on Henry's back and his left hand holding the reins in the air above the saddle horn, the way his grandmother had shown him.

From this high up, Albert could see over the fields of green corn. A few times he stopped Henry and sat for a while, telling himself that Henry belonged to him, that these were his fields and that if they wanted to, he and Henry could ride in any direction. At the top of the hill, he stopped again to look back. The whole town was there, the church steeple, the clock on the courthouse, his grandmother's yard with its trees and all the other trees that showed you where the town started and ended. Albert pretended that he and Henry were leaving, that they would be back someday, but he didn't know when. It might not be for a long time.

He leaned forward and whispered in Henry's ear, "You'll like it there." Henry shook his head. "Don't worry," said Albert. "I'll take care of you." Then he made the clicking sound with his tongue, the way his grandmother had, and they went over the hill.

Later that afternoon, his father and mother took Albert's sister visiting somewhere in town. Albert stayed home with Grandma Grace. The farmer who owned Henry came and put him in a trailer, then drove away. A cloud of dust rose on the road behind them and Albert wondered if the dust wouldn't get into Henry's mouth. He thought it would have been nicer to let him ride Henry home, but his grandmother told him it was better for Henry this way, that Henry would get tired walking so far. He had thought

that probably wasn't true, that Henry could probably make it on the soft roads all the way to Texas, which was at the very bottom of the map on the wall at home. He didn't say anything to his grandmother about it because he knew there were things you had to let people believe you believed, like that the tree house he sat in was a rocketship, that you could see sailboats from an airplane and that you liked to make things happen with your chemistry set.

He swung his legs again, watched his shoelace, then looked out the portal and saw his mother through the kitchen window. She was smiling and nodding her head, probably at some dumb question his sister, Ellen, had asked. Albert loved it when his mother smiled. Sometimes he'd look and see her smiling when she didn't know he was watching, and then he'd watch her and watch her until the smile went off her face.

He turned back to his shoes and thought about the man who had come to his classroom the week before. His name was Professor Trautwein and every year he came to Mianus on the train from New Haven, from Yale, the same school Albert's father had gone to. Professor Trautwein came to tell the third grade classes about the history of their town.

He was a tall man, old, with black eyebrows and white hair that fell down to his shoulders. He tacked a map of

Mianus to the bulletin board and brushed his long fingers back over his hair. Miss Fogg made the class quiet. Finally, when they were all watching, Professor Trautwein began to talk about Indians and point at the the map. As he talked, his eyebrows went up and down and Barry Mills laughed at that and tried to make other people laugh by imitating him. But Professor Trautwein didn't see Barry. He kept on telling them about the Indians that had lived in Mianus once, and as he did so, he passed pictures of the Indians around. Whenever one of the pictures came to Albert, he kept it awhile, until Miss Fogg told him, "Albert, pass that along now." Even then, he'd look at the drawing a little longer and still be looking at it when he passed it to Gloria Dunwitty.

Professor Trautwein told the story of how the head of the tribe, who was called Mianus, like their town, had tricked a white man from Massachusetts into believing that he now owned the land, and that when the white man came back the next year with others from Massachusetts to take the land he thought he owned, Mianus spit in his eye and knocked him out with a stick of wood. The class laughed at that part and Professor Trautwein's eyebrows went up and down more quickly. He smiled a moment, then began speaking quietly. He turned toward the map and pointed to a cove that wasn't far from Albert's house.

"The settlers regrouped," he said, "and drove Mianus and his people down to these mud flats, where the clam beds were. For three days they shot the Indians and built bonfires to see them by at night. On the fourth day, Mianus took two children in his arms and swam out into the sound. The white men followed along the shoreline, firing their muskets whenever he tried to come in. Mianus grew tired. Finally, he made it to a sandbar where he lay the children down and rested. Some think he was trying to make it to Great Captain's Island" (the professor pointed at the map) "but he never had a chance. The tide came in and Mianus and the children floated away. No Indians were ever seen here again."

Barry Mills laughed at that too. Professor Trautwein turned and looked at Miss Fogg who told Barry to leave the room and wait out in the hall until she came to get him. Albert raised his hand.

"Why didn't they ride away?" he asked.

Professor Trautwein smiled. "If they'd had horses, they might have." he said. "But a horse was a very rare thing in America then. Almost no Indians had them."

Albert didn't understand that. Whenever he saw a movie with Indians in it, they were on horses.

The rest of his talk was about the settlers and Albert didn't listen. Their names were like the names of people in his neighborhood, like children in his school;

Williams and Johnson and Smith. There was a girl named Debbie Smith in the front row of desks, and when Professor Trautwein said the name Smith, she put up her hand and said, "Smith? I'm Debbie Smith." Albert didn't want to hear about Smiths and Williamses. Debbie Smith wore shoes that went "tip-tap, tip-tap" in line on the way to the cafeteria. She smiled the same way her shoes tapped, just to let you know she was coming. And on Quentin Lane there was a boy named Phil Williams who was in junior high and had once poked a stick in dog-doo and put it on the back of Albert's head, so why did he care about people named Williams or Smith?

Albert wanted to ask Professor Trautwein some more questions. He wanted to find out how it was possible to have Indians without horses. That would have to be explained to him before he'd believe it and he'd gotten up and started walking toward the professor after he finished. "Sit down, Albert," Miss Fogg called to him. He went back to his desk and never did find out whether or not it was true. "Did you have another question?" Miss Fogg asked him when the professor had left to go to the next classroom. "No." he said. He wouldn't ask her. What did she know about Indians? Probably nothing. He thought Indians without horses was only another thing people wanted you to believe, another thing that wasn't

true, like the spaceship he was sitting in. It was nailed to a tree and would never move.

He heard the back door open and shut, and his mother calling him in to dinner. She wasn't yelling now, it was almost like singing when she called him this way. That meant she wasn't mad at him anymore and he dropped the rope ladder through the hatch and went down and into the house.

Albert's father didn't eat with them that night. He lay on the couch in the TV room, smoking, drinking booze and watching a show about the war. After dinner, Albert went in and asked his father if they could watch one of his shows which had already started on another channel.

"No," he said, "I'm sick. "Can't I just watch what I want to this one night? Why don't you go work on your chemistry set? Why don't you do something constructive?"

In the kitchen, his mother smoked and turned the pages of a magazine. On the other side of the table, his sister drew pictures. She had a shoebox full of colored magic markers and she kneeled on a stool, bent over close so that her hair fell onto the pad. When she heard Albert come in, she looked up and made a kind of frog face at him. He made it back at her and she stuck out her tongue and shook her shoulders. He let it go.



"Do you think Dad has the flu?" he asked his mother.

"I don't know, honey." she said. "Maybe you better not bother him tonight. He's not feeling very well."

"Albert, honey, Albert, honey," his sister laughed and shook her head from side to side.

"Shut up," said Albert and he made a fist at his sister, cocked it back behind his ear.

His mother took his arm, gently. She ran her hand along it, down to his fist, which she pried open and rubbed with the soft skin of her fingertips and palm.

"Hush, honey," she said. "Don't pay any attention to her. She's younger than you. Let it pass."

Later that night, after his mother had kissed him and tucked him into bed, he heard her talking with his father in the kitchen. Albert's bedroom was above the kitchen and if he put his ear against the heating vent at the foot of his bed, he could hear almost anything that was said below.

His father spoke quietly, so low that Albert couldn't understand him at first. He didn't hear his mother's voice at all for a while, then he heard her say, "Blood?" in the same tone she used when he came in late for supper. She said it again: "Blood?" and "In the toilet?"

"Shhh..." said his father.

"Is it hemorrhoids?" she asked.

"Keep it down," he said. "I don't know."

"Do you want to go to the hospital?"

"Don't get so excited."

He laughed in a funny way, a little louder than usual and long enough to make it ring for a moment in the vent. Nothing more was said. Albert heard him patting her back, which meant they were kissing. He got back into his bed. You weren't supposed to watch people when they kissed the way his father and mother kissed and you probably weren't supposed to listen to them either.

He wondered, What was a hemorrhoid? It was on TV but they didn't tell you what it was. You got rid of it with shampoo or toothpaste or something. Maybe it was the same as eczema. On television they said both were itchy, so maybe they were the same. And they were both strange words too, like the chemistry words--potassium, eczema, sulfur, hemorrhoid. He didn't know.

He closed his eyes and stopped thinking about them, thought instead about riding Henry on the roads that were soft to your feet. In the back of his head, he heard Grandma Grace's voice, crackling the way it always did when she sang. He remembered when he was smaller she'd let him sit on her knee and bounce him up and down, singing,

Pony boy, pony boy,  
You're my little pony boy,

and she had sweet breath, like grass or butter, that didn't bother you at all.

## II

In the morning his father was never in the kitchen with his tie and suit on anymore. He slept late, was home all the time now, wearing sweatshirts and old pants and socks. When Albert came home from school, the television would be running and he might see his father in the hall going toward the TV room.

One rainy day, as his mother was driving him to school, he asked her why his father didn't ride the train in to New York the way he used to. They were waiting at a stoplight. She didn't look at him.

"Well, you know he's sick, Alby." she said. "The medicine he takes makes him too dizzy to go into the city."

"How long before the medicine works?"

"I don't know." she said and looked at him with an unhappy smile. She turned back to watch the windshield wipers and let her hands slide down to the bottom of the steering wheel. Her arms went limp the way they did when she said, "Whew, what a day." Her eyes followed the

windshield wipers. "They don't say how long it might take. They never tell you that."

"It isn't the flu or a cold, is it? I don't hear him sneeze or cough."

"No. It's something you can't see on the outside, something a person feels but can't see."

"Is it hemorrhoids?"

She turned to him, surprised. "Where did you hear that?"

"It's on TV," he said.

"No," said his mother. "I wish it were."

A car honked from behind to tell them the light had changed and they went on.

That day after school, Albert came in and heard the television going. He went quietly to the door of the TV room and stopped to look in. His father was lying on the couch, staring out the window at the spaceship in the tree. For a long time, Albert stood watching him run his hand across his forehead. He was about to go away when his father said, "What did you learn in school today?"

He hadn't looked at Albert. He still stared out the window and rubbed his hand over his face. Albert tried to think of what to say, tried to think how to tell his father what he'd learned, but before he could answer, his father said "quantum mechanics" and began to talk about

things Albert had never heard of. There was a smiling woman doing laundry on the TV. His father wasn't watching it. He kept asking questions that he answered himself. Albert realized that his father didn't know he was there and he didn't like the way it made him feel. He wanted to go away but he was afraid his father would hear him and ask questions he couldn't answer, questions about chemistry and other things.

"Where do you think you want to go to college?" asked his father.

"Yale," he said, then laughed and said, "Go Bulldogs."

He made his voice serious. "But you'll have to work for it," he said. "I've still got friends there, but you'll have to work pretty damn hard to get in. You'll have to earn it."

Albert cupped his hands around his mouth and turned and called back down the hallway, "Anybody home?" He stomped his feet on the carpet outside the door, soft at first, then hard to make it sound like he was running up the hall, then he came into the room.

Now his father watched the television where a woman smiled while she mopped a floor.

"Hi, Dad," he said. "What are you watching?"

"Oh, nothing. Some game show, I guess." His father shook a cigarette from the pack on the table, lit it and

gave off a long breath of smoke. "You're home from school." he said.

"Yeah, I'm home. I just got here a minute ago."

His father nodded and said nothing. He watched the TV.

"You know what we did today?" said Albert.

Without turning, his father shook his head.

"We had to write down what we think they'll find when they land on the moon. I said horses. What do you think they'll find?"

His father shrugged his shoulders and took a drag off his cigarette, held it a while, then breathed out. "Who knows?" he said. "Probably nothing,"

They both watched the television. People from the game show jumped around, screaming. A woman had won something expensive and everyone else was happy for her.

Albert said, "I know they won't find horses up there. I was only kidding. There's no air on the moon. I remember you told me that, it's like being underwater. A horse would suffocate or something up there."

His father nodded his head and had more of the cigarette. He said, "Your mother took your sister for a dancing lesson. They should be back pretty soon."

"All right," said Albert. "Jimmy Elkind went swimming at the Boy's Club. I'm going down in the

basement to work on my chemistry set. I'll write down what I do this time."

"Fine," said his father, taking another drag.

On the way to the basement door, Albert saw his sister had left her art pad and the shoebox full of colored marker pens on the kitchen table. He wasn't supposed to touch her things--his mother yelled at him if he did--but he thought it might be nice to draw awhile. As soon as he heard his mother and sister come in, he'd put the paper and pens back in the kitchen or in Ellen's room while she wasn't looking and she'd never find out.

In the basement, he pushed the pieces of his chemistry set off to the side, laid the pad of paper on the table and tore away the top sheet. The picture his sister had drawn looked like an ugly tree growing out of the roof of a poorly shaped house. He thought it was bad, a stupid drawing, and he balled it up and threw it onto the floor. In the shoebox he found brown, blue, black, red and green markers and set them next to the paper. They were the only colors he'd use. Yellow, pink and purple were the ones his sister drew with, colors that made whatever she did look like the Saturday morning cartoons, like nothing you could ever really see. Albert wanted to make pictures that were like something you had seen once. He took the caps off the pens and started to draw.

A long time went by. He didn't know how long, maybe an hour, maybe two. He didn't know why he had stopped either, but when he looked at the table in front of him, he saw four different pictures.

None was as good as he'd wanted it to be. The noses on the Indians in the sailboat were closer to his father's nose than they were to the Indians he'd seen Professor Trautwein pass around. In another, there was a horse whose legs were too short. He'd tried to draw his Grandma Feeney and come up with someone halfway between her and Ata who sold candy at the little house by the railroad station.

Albert smiled. The drawings weren't the same as what you saw in your head. There were problems; a hand was bigger than a foot, an ear had been blackened out from trying to fix it too many times. But for all the mistakes there were other parts that looked almost exactly as they should; a bow, an arm and an arrowhead, a finger, straight and with the right number of joints spaced as they were on his own, a rock with a wave falling on it. Even though he couldn't remember doing the drawings or what he'd been thinking when he did, he liked them. He propped them up against the wall and decided to do more.

He'd just begun to draw Henry, the pony, in a place he imagined to be Texas, when he heard his sister scream his name in the kitchen. He heard her stomping her feet



on the floorboards above, then the basement door opened. The lights went out. He thought of the hole in the wall above him to the left and looked at it, wondering what might be inside.

"Hey!" he yelled. "Turn on those lights."

They came on and his sister was running down the basement steps. Without turning to look at her, Albert scribbled over the beginning of the pony's head.

"You stink!" his sister shouted. She slapped him on the shoulder and put her mouth beside his ear. "That's mine!" she screamed and when he flinched, his arm hit her in the stomach.

"Alby," his mother called down. "Give Ellen back her things."

He threw his sister's art pad on the floor and as she was bending to pick it up, saying, "Albert stinks, Albert sucks.." he drew an "S" across the bottom of her pink leotards.

She screamed and tried to hit him with the pad.

"Shut up," he said and shoved her backwards into a sitting position on the floor.

At first, she just sat there, squinting at him. Then tears filled her eyes and the crying began. It came in a loud wail that lasted all the way up the stairs, then turned into a screech at the door and kept going in

painfully loud bursts in the kitchen. His mother came to the door and called down, "Albert, come up here."

Farther back, he heard his father's voice booming, "What the hell's all this noise?"

He recognized his father's footsteps on the floor above and pushed the chair against the wall. He pulled himself up into the hole and kicked the chair away, sending it toward the chemistry table. A moment later, Albert heard heavy breathing coming down the stairs. He ducked away from the opening of the hole, out of the light. He waited, heard his father's slippered feet slide along the concrete floor. It wouldn't take long to figure out where Albert was and there was no place to go from inside the hole. He listened carefully and heard nothing.

Albert peered around the edge and saw his father standing over the table where the chemistry set, the shoebox full of pens and the four finished drawings were. His father's arms hung out at his sides, his chin was against his chest, every breath bobbing his head up and back, up and back. Then, without moving much, his father reached across and swept everything off the end of the table. He turned and came toward the hole.

When he saw his father's face at the hole it scared him. They eyes were deep and hollow and his nostrils were wide open. There was nothing on his mouth, it was slack and told Albert nothing. He moved backward into the light

that fell through the opening and their eyes met for an instant. His father was there but he was not there--at the same time, there but not there. The man standing at the hole in the concrete was a person Albert had never seen before. His father's face had been getting smaller, skinnier, but it wasn't that that made him look different, it was the eyes. The eyes that looked in wanted nothing from him, expected nothing, like the eyes of some man you bumped into in the grocery store, they travelled over Albert's face once, then turned and disappeared.

Albert crawled out of the light into a dark corner, and as he went along, he found that the floor was covered with soft dirt, the softest dirt he'd ever felt. He dug through it and uncovered concrete, but that didn't matter. He only cared about what was on top, this dirt, smoother than the road behind Grandma Grace's house. He closed his eyes and he and Henry were on the top of a hill looking down over a town. They were leaving. They might be back someday, but he couldn't say when. That would depend on Henry. If Henry could make it without getting tired, they might never be back.

## On Waking into Dreams

Of course, you can't see anything out of a glass eye. Once in a while someone asks me that, "Can you see out of it?" but I don't even answer them anymore. And then people at parties, people I'd only met an hour earlier, used to ask my girlfriend, Liz, "What's with Jack's left eye? I don't want to pry or anything, but what's wrong with it?" It feels and always has felt like someone's got their thumb in my head. Humid days, when the rains have come, the thumb presses inward harder and then I can't help but think about the way I lost it. I remember Milton Weir, the boy who shot it out, and sometimes even his father, a gray blur walking a downturned sprinkler to another corner of the yard. And if I let it go on, I'll see Milton's father, as I thought of him in the stories my grandmother told, a janitor on an army cot in the courthouse basement, dying, staring out of sleep at the sudden tingling of carbonation inside his head, the hemorrhage blooming, spreading blood and pressure through the soft part of his brain. Then the

pain, the forgetting and the question in his eyes as he passes into a memory in the future, forever.

I used to dream about what happened, two, three, four nights a week, dream about it from all angles until I had the bush Milton hid under marked down to the last leaf. Sometimes I'd dream that I was Milton, would feel the small breeze in his crewcut, like feathers across my scalp. I'd have his broad square head, the pointed ears and eye-teeth squinting against the red evening sky.

I was visiting for the summer in Iowa from Connecticut, seven years old on a tire swing hanging from the giant oak in my grandmother's front lawn. I was above him across the street because my grandmother's yard sloped down suddenly at the edge and the mailman had to climb a long flight of concrete steps to get up and across to the door. I had come to a perfect stop, heels dug hard and immediate into the bare circle of dust below the tire. I had been going very hard and high, almost to where I imagined myself lying flat out in the sky above the earth, so I was breathless with a pounding heart and the adrenalin just then starting to fall back. I looked down at the little dust still settling, felt how soft it was inside my sneakers between my bare toes, fiddled them together in the softness, smelled the dust as it fell away from my mouth, sucked it off my teeth. I had beautiful round eyes (my mother has photographs to prove it) and I

used them on the dry dirt falling through the last sunlight that left eye ever saw.

I smelled engine oil where it had been rubbed into the rope around the tire, then I felt him, Milton's pellet, and saw black with a million points of light born in the middle and scattering outward. I went down, my mouth full of dust, my face hot and wet, and I smashed my head on the ground, went into it and into it. I heard nothing. I pushed this new mud against my face and the dirt was in my nose, filling my mouth, and the tire bumped my back like a dog nudging me, and each time I banged my head against the ground the stars stopped for a moment, then went faster again. I'd soaked the front of my cut-off jeans in piss. I was going to go to the bathroom just before dinner, but held it on the swing.

I'd alternate the dreams so that some nights I'd find myself standing over Milton where he hid behind the bush in his front yard. I'd see him watch, wait, until my brother and grandmother came out. He watched the way I watched reactions in my chemistry set in the basement back home. Then I'd be inside him, would know what he knew, that we came in the summertime, my brother and I, from someplace in the east, somewhere that began with a capital "C" and that he couldn't say at all, that my brother had called him a "homo" the week before for wearing a tee-shirt swimming at the lake, that my grandmother's house

was above his house and that we would eat ice-cream on my grandmother's front porch and look down at his mother on her little porch swing while she folded and sniffed and refolded his underpants off the line.

He knew that there was nothing else for us to do out on the porch but eat ice-cream and watch her. He had seen us in tie-dyed tee-shirts and cut-off jeans and with long hair that nobody cared about all summer. He had his gun with him and he saw me. He stopped behind the bush at the corner of his house. He knew his gun would carry that far. He knew he had oiled it that morning, that the bolt slid easily with a nice click, a sound he loved after loading. He knew he'd have to aim a little high to allow for gravity, which he couldn't name but understood from practice on crows and squirrels at that distance.

He fixed the flat sight and swung the barrel side to side, considering a shot as the tire and I paused at the top of an arc, but he waited. He waited as straight as the gun, as flat on his stomach as a gun laid in the grass. He had a clear shot because the only trees in front of him were still young, planted by his father five years before, a cedar, just a bush really, and a dogwood that would die.

He didn't really know where he was. He was lying in range below a bush at the corner of his house and he knew that the street was called Illinois Avenue, but he didn't know that there was a state called Illinois and that he

was in the next state over, Iowa, and that the hospital his mother walked six miles to twice a week was in another state called Missouri. He knew that there was baseball in Kansas City but not that Kansas City was less than three hours away by car. He could not have placed himself in relation to Mexico or Canada or either ocean. He had been to Des Moines once, the summer before in his uncle's car, when his father was taken there to be buried,. He never saw Des Moines or his uncle again. He knew only this distance between us, the distance that shortened and shortened until it was like a tube with mirrored walls and his eye and my eye were together. Then he fired and watched. When my brother looked down at his yard, he was gone.

I started wearing wrap-around tortoiseshell sunglasses in ninth grade, but I wasn't allowed to wear them during gym class and so I began to lie. "It's blind," I'd say in the locker room. "I can't see anything out of it. That's why it doesn't move, because it doesn't know where to go." And if they asked why I wore sunglasses, I told them that was because sometimes the light would make it hurt.

When I met Liz, I was wearing blindered mountaineering glasses. I was wearing them in a restaurant



in New York five or six years before it became fashionable to do so. I was the assistant manager of the place. I'd just gotten off for the night and was having a few beers at the bar. She was sitting on a stool to my left, but I hadn't seen her yet. I was listening to a man I'd never seen in there before, a man with a twisted-in face and a beard growing up almost to his eyes tell a table full of people a story. It was about how a woman they all knew had mistreated a man they all knew and how this had made him leave town because wherever he went he saw her or a thing that reminded him of her. They were shaking their heads and drinking slowly.

I'd been listening for ten minutes to the story going on behind me and watching them over my right shoulder through the backbar mirror. Usually, no matter what I was doing, I stretched my neck every minute or so, rolled my head from side to side to get a look at what was happening on my left. With the story going on, I'd forgotten to do that. When it ended, I rolled my head and noticed a woman on a stool with her body half-turned in my direction. She was staring at me.

"Can you see out of those things?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. "But you can't see in."

She smiled and stirred her drink. "Will you take them off?"

"No,"

"Why not?"

"The light," I said. "The left one's mostly blind, but the light still hurts it for some reason. That's why I wear them. If I take them off, after a few minutes I get a headache, even when it's this dim."

She looked at me and at herself in the mirror. "When will you, then?"

"Later," I said. "When I get home."

She was not the exact woman, not the one from college who'd fed me acid on a bluff above the Iowa River while the Perseid meteors shot over us. Eight years had gone by since then. In that time, I'd never found the one to come up to Annie, who would tap the back of her fingernail against my glass eye and say "I'm keeping an eye on you." or something else that meant nothing without her face to say it. I'd been looking for Annie ever since, for a shoulder in moonlight that way, for the feeling on the inside of her thigh of dust or ash on polished wood. And I'd been looking for one like her even harder than usual because on my way home from the restaurant I'd taken to stopping to watch schoolchildren playing through a chainlink fence.

It was probably not too smart, a man with sunglasses and a second-hand topcoat, chainsmoking cigarettes, stopping to admire children that way, but I didn't care anymore. I just stood there watching the complete

drunkenness of their play, the absolute natural order of it. Finally, after about a week of this, the big bull woman with the fresh crewcut and hard jaw who watched over them came up to me and spoke out the side of her mouth through the fence: "Is something wrong?"

"No," I said. "What could possibly be wrong with this?"

"A lot of strange things happen these days, all right?"

"Yes," I said, looking her up and down. "I can see that."

I didn't stop again, but I had a picture of them there in my mind, a picture that I needed.

I say needed because lately I'd been waking up with lit cigarettes in my fingers. I'd done the same thing for a while after Annie. I was doing it again, I think, because I couldn't remember her anymore. I was looking for someone like her, but when I tried to bring back a particular feeling or the way she sang or walked or laughed, I'd just come up with a kind of general idea of her face and shoulder, or of words to describe her finger lightly flicking my eye. For seven or eight years I'd been slowly wearing those memories out and I guess when they were finally gone I started smoking in my sleep again.

So I'd found these children in a schoolyard through a fence to make up for Annie and without caring who saw me,

I watched them. After a few days, I'd decided that was what I wanted, one of my own to watch and explain how things really were, how certain cabdrivers with confused smiles could not be trusted to get you to certain parts of town, how to watch for ugly situations--madness--evolving on subway trains, how to get off in time, which music you could live by, which things to read and remember, which to read and forget. I'd decided the way to understand it all was to explain it to someone else, to someone I couldn't afford to make mistakes with.

That was when Liz found me and for a while I thought we'd work. After only a couple of weeks, we were spending almost all our free time together and there was nothing uneasy about it--no unanswered telephone messages, no embarrassing pauses when we talked.

There were days when I'd just forget the sunglasses altogether. Halfway to Greenwich Village, I'd see myself in the window of the subway door and remember I'd forgotten my glasses, but nobody in the train seemed to noticed and I didn't care. At work, I'd look the waitresses and the Chinese cooks straight in the face, and they'd smile at me, especially the cooks. They'd crowd around the little window of the kitchen door, their skin shining and red from the heat, their cheeks touching as they winked, nodded and raised eyebrows in wry approval of

seeing me meet Liz and kiss her at the bar. I was on top of things at last, after years of bad luck, I was back and they could see it in my face. I could see it there too.

One morning, lying under damp sheets with the bedroom window open and the spring funk from the park thick in the air, she asked me, "Why do you lie about it, Jack? Yesterday I was talking to one of the waitresses, to Diane, and she asked me what you'd done to get over the headaches, why you didn't need to wear the sunglasses anymore. I can't understand it. A lot of people would give an arm to be able to see at all."

I turned to her, wondering, as always, whether expressing something with my good eye showed the other up worse than usual.

"I knew it was fake the first time you took those damn glasses off. When you told me, I'd already known for weeks. Did you think I'd care?"

"How couldn't you?" I said, turning away. I watched the ceiling, watched in particular an old water stain with the outline of Australia. After a moment, I asked her, "What do you think when you look at it?"

She propped herself above my stomach and stared down. "I don't," she said. "I just look in the right. To be honest, I like it better that way. It's more direct, less confusing. And besides, when you're this close, you can't really look into both eyes anyway."

She was right. I tried to look into both of her eyes at once and I couldn't.

By the time Liz moved in, I didn't much care about the newspaper anymore. It came once a week, on Thursdays, my grandmother's hometown paper, The Courier. In those first few months together, if she was ever with me when The Courier came, I stuffed it aside somewhere, under magazines or on the bookshelf, then waited till I was alone to read it. I was embarrassed about the thing. I'd been subscribing to it for three years, ever since my grandmother moved from Iowa to Dallas to be near my uncle, and though I'd tried for a long time to convince myself that I got the paper because of my interest in the town, I knew that was a lie.

The Courier was a badly-pasted ten page rag full of futures prices, local sports, travel bulletins ( "Harriet Whitley gone three days to Joplin, Mo." ), arrivals, deaths, births and county government. It was as good as could be expected for a town of twelve or thirteen hundred people and the only reason I kept up the subscription was that I hoped someday I'd read about Milton in it.

Before my grandmother moved, I'd ask her now and then during telephone conversations if she ever heard anything about him, but she never had. He had left town as soon as he could drive and though she knew that his mother still

walked to see the psychiatrist at the hospital across the border and that she went there by bus in the winter, she knew nothing more for certain. There had been talk of him living somewhere down south, but my grandmother couldn't remember where she'd heard that, whether the source was reliable.

The paper cost next to nothing, twenty-six dollars a year, and I knew that they almost always ran photos when former residents returned to town. I just wanted to see how he'd grown up, wanted to be able to look at him, head and shoulders, perhaps in some military uniform. I wondered what he'd become.

The day she moved in, Liz was dumping a garbage bag full of her shoes into the closet. I was standing behind her, halfway across the room with a box of her books in my arms. I saw her bend down, begin to arrange her shoes flat on the closet floor and then pull aside a monogrammed terry-cloth robe, a gift from my mother I'd never worn. There was an old Courier underneath it

"What's this?" she asked, showing it to me. She smiled.

"It's my father's hometown newspaper."

She saw the stick-on address label and said, "You get it in the mail? How come I've never seen it before?"

"It doesn't take very long to read. Mostly I just take a quick look and throw it away."

"Then why do you still get it?"

"To sort of keep up on things. I spent a lot of time there growing up."

"What things?" She was still smiling when she looked at the copy in her hand. There was a caption below a photograph of some tall skinny poker-faced girl standing on a bed of straw with a tethered bull behind her. Liz read it. " 'Eleven year old Jody Pergandy showing off her prize Charolais in the 4H stock show at the Taylor County Fairgrounds last week.' ... Do you know her?"

"No," I said. "I hardly know anyone who lives there anymore. Here, give it to me. I'll throw it away."

The next Thursday when I came home from work there was no mail in our box. Business had been slow at the restaurant Liz worked at and she'd come home early. As I stood at the kitchen table looking through the mail, she came up behind me and said, "Oh, you got your Nodaway Courier too." She handed it to me and I laughed a little. "There's a benefit for Max Boling at the First Lutheran Church," she said. "Do you know him? He's going to lose his farm." I shook my head no and went into the other room to sit down.

As I thumbed through the travel bulletins and the who's-visiting-town-this-week column, Liz came in. I turned the page and found a photograph under the obituary heading. It was the only picture on the page, a man who



looked to be about my age with a crew-cut and wide ears tapering to points on the ends. I looked into his eyes and thought, this could be him, this could be Milton. There was no caption under the photo so I had to read through several sentences before learning that this dead man was Lester Dodd, sixty-nine, of a heart attack in a Council Bluffs hospital. It was an old picture of him. His clothes, which I hadn't noticed at first, showed that plainly enough. When I looked up, Liz was staring down at me.

"Jack, what is it?" she asked, frowning.

"Nothing, really," I said. "Just this obituary. I thought for a minute it was someone I knew once, but it's not."

"Who did you think it was? You told me you didn't know anyone who lived there anymore."

"I don't. It was no one," I said, rubbing my forehead. "Just forget it."

"It's weird, Jack. I don't think I ever saw you look like that before."

"I suppose there are a lot of ways you've never seen me look, so just drop it."

I threw the paper across the floor under an end table and stared out the window into another window on the building behind ours. The same short man with the same long face I'd seen for years fed sunflower seeds to his

parakeet, swinging the bird left and right, bobbing it up and down as he did so. He talked to the bird and made kissing faces, sad faces and happy faces, and sometimes, when the bird wouldn't take the seed, he showed what looked like real anger, holding his thumb and forefinger below the parakeet's neck, as though he might squeeze the life out of the tiny thing. Right then, I hated Milton more than I had in years.

Liz put her fingertips on the left side of my forehead, above my glass eye, and asked, "Does it have to do with this?"

"Yes," I said, nodding. "I guess it does."

"You told me you lost it in Iowa, when you were at your grandmother's, but you didn't say how. 'An accident,' was all you'd ever tell me. Do you want to tell me now? You don't have to, but do you want to?"

"I dont want to," I said, "I will, but I'd rather not."

"Jack, really," she said, "We're going to have to talk about this sometime. You know that, right?"

She began to rub my temple, not deeply and hard, but almost so I didn't feel it or so that I would forget that I felt it, a continuous rhythm, a measured and puposeful motion that I stopped trying to count the beats of almost immediately.

I think now that I should've told Liz everything. I should've told her about the piss in my pants, about the blood, so much more than I'd ever felt that I thought it was water my brother had poured on. And the hospital down in Missouri, the same one Milton's mother walked to every week across the border, my grandmother standing in the room behind the dividing curtain, crying and cursing in words I'd never heard her use. My brother at the lake two weeks later, holding Milton under the water off the diving float until he'd had to break my brother's thumb to get loose. And I imagine that, while I talked, she'd have stroked the back of my neck, would never have said a thing, never have sighed or lost her breath. She would just listen until I was done.

Of course, it didn't happen that way. I was ashamed of my obsession and didn't want Liz to know anymore than she already knew. I told her Milton's name and that his father had died the year before I lost my eye. I told her a little about it, just enough so that she started to feel for me, started to shake her head in sorrow, but never the whole thing.

It was fine until the rains came in August and then there was more water in the air than I'd ever known. I counted six days of sun all month and even that light was

thick as steam flowing wild out a manhole. When it wasn't raining, it got up to a hundred and your clothes stuck to you all day, sometimes worse at night, and the streets stunk of all the scum that the rain had freed up, the heat stewing it together in small pools at every corner. All day it was as though someone had stuck a greasy thick-skinned balloon in my socket and would not stop blowing on the thing.

And at night I would dream, dream things that I remembered all too clearly in the morning, Milton's father in his rumpled gray janitor suit moving an inverted rainbow suspended below a downturned sprinkler, a meadowlark with a quarter-inch glass tube run straight through its body, composite faces, some of which I'd known in waking life, melting together on the inside of my eyelid, then burning away like a movieframe before a projector's hot bulb.

One night I woke Liz by flicking a lighter to get a cigarette going and she had to shake me and yell, "Jack, wake up. Look what you're doing, look at this!" After that, she put my cigarettes in the refrigerator at night because she said she thought maybe I wouldn't find them in there. She made me switch sides, sleep closer to the wall, but it didn't help. I'd known it would happen, that the rains would come. They'd been coming for twenty years, and in spite of what the doctors said, I'd never gotten used

to it. Every year felt worse than the last, which was worse than the one before.

There was a thing Annie used to do with her thumbs pressed hard against my temples and her fingers tickling lightly over my face. She'd sit against the headboard of the bed while I lay back on her soft stomach and breasts. She'd wrap her legs around me, then I'd close my eyes and she'd work my head, work it, I imagined, the way she'd work a lump of clay on her potter's wheel. Neither of us would talk. In the darkness, I'd imagine myself standing in the bedroom doorway, watching Annie shape my head into what we both wanted, something whole, all of a piece. She'd leave long smooth kisses on the back of my neck and my chin would fall down onto my collarbone. All the energy would go out of me and we'd stay there like that, sometimes, I think, for hours and hours.

I never hit Annie, only the wall. I'd jump out of sleep, out of a dream in which a white-skinned naked old man with bloodshot eyes, maybe Milton's father, was putting the dull side of an axe against my forehead again and again, or another where I sat in a barber's chair and let toothless monkeys put their hands into a hole in the top of my head. I'd know, inside the dream, that I was asleep. The scene would change suddenly, the dream making me think for a moment that I'd awakened, until something completely out of context would show up. If, for instance,

I'd come to in my grandmother's bedroom, where I had often gone when dreams disturbed me, I'd see Annie naked in a chair in the corner, or the redhaired girl with freckles on her shoulder whom I'd loved all through junior high. Then I knew that I was still dreaming and I'd try to wake up, but my chest, arms and neck felt so heavy, so immovable, that I would resign myself to the new dream until it became unbearable and I'd force myself to wake into another. To finally leave this took violence. I'd throw myself, forehead and fists, against the wall and Annie would pull me back to her and begin again with her thumbs on my temples.

She stuck out that first rainy season, a long one, six weeks, and all the rest of that next year as well. But when the barometer started changing and she asked me if I'd ever thought about the Southwest, maybe Tucson or Santa Fe, I told her, "No, you go ahead. I've never lived where it's dry. It might be worse. Who knows what could happen down there?"

It was the headbanging that finally got to Liz. Maybe it was just everything, but I think that was mainly the reason. We were sitting at the breakfast table one morning, the week after she'd taken the cigarettes away from the bedside. Her eyes were staring into a corner where there was nothing to look at but the two walls coming together. A deep dull pain beat against the back of

my glass eye and spread from there through the rest of my head. I'd given Liz five cups of coffee already and she asked for another. We stared past each other. Every so often, I glanced her way and said something worthless -- "Do you think there'll be much business at the restaurant tonight?" -- things like that. Finally, she looked me in the eye and said, "It won't work. I can't do it anymore."

"What have I been doing?" I said. "I understand what you mean, but I have to know exactly."

She got out of her chair, came over to my side of the table and put her hand on the back of my head. It was numb where she touched me. "Feel this," she said and took my hand off the table. "This is what you've been doing." The bump gave under my fingers like an old lemon. I took my hand away and she sat down.

"How long?" I asked.

"All night," she said, sighing.

"I mean, how long exactly? I'm sorry, Liz, but I need to know."

"I don't know, it was so slow and steady...against the wall all night ... for hours and hours. I tried to wake you, but when I touched you, you did it harder and scared the hell out of me."

"And you couldn't sleep," I said, which was stupid because no makeup in the world would have changed the way she looked.

She closed her eyes and said, "You need to see a doctor."

"I have," I told her, "and there's nothing they can do for it. They say there isn't any reason for the pressure, then they give me pills that make me groggy in the morning, make my tongue feel like a fish for the rest of the day. I tried them once and I never will again."

She opened her eyes and looked back in the corner. "Not that kind of doctor, Jack. That's not what I meant."

I got up from the table and started for the bathroom. Before I left, without turning to her, I said, "I can see why you'd think so, but you're wrong about that, believe me. I've thought a lot about it myself and that's not the answer. I know what I'm talking about."

When Liz went, she went slowly, mercifully, one pair of shoes, one dress, two blouses at a time. She'd call now and then at nine or ten at night to say she'd gone out after work with some of the other waitresses, that she was all the way downtown and would probably just stay over at one of their apartments. Then she'd come home at six or seven in the morning, when I was dead asleep, to wake me. We went on for another month that way, until I saw where it was going and I saw that she did too and told her so.

I'd see her once in a while, at a bar we used to go to, at an automated bank machine, and then for the last time at Battery Park with a short, European-looking man in



a leather topcoat and big black designer glasses. They were waiting in line for the boat out to the Statue of Liberty. She had let her dark hair grow quite long and the wind from the open harbor blew it lightly off her shoulder, occasionally into the man's face. He didn't seem to mind and Liz didn't try to hold it down or move away to stop it.

I stayed away from Battery Park for two months after that. It was and always will be my favorite place to sit on Manhattan Island, but I couldn't stand even the memory of seeing her there. I knew what that hair felt like, knew the smell of it and the smell of her neck beneath it.

The last time I looked at a Courier was on a Thursday in the middle of September, just after the rains had stopped, when a strong wind had blown up from the narrows through the harbor and dried all the water away. I was taking the mail in and I saw that there were two photographs on the front page. I stopped in the stairwell and sat down.

The picture to the left showed a long stretch of blacktop with a roadsign in the foreground that said 138. It was the bottomland, the Nodaway River floodplain and the road was the one that followed the river on into Missouri. To one side of the blacktop lay a long flat

stretch of field, either fallow or mown and baled already, and on the other side the cottonwoods that showed you where the river ran. A white arrow pointed to the shoulder of the two-lane and the caption below said, "Where the body was found." The dust the arrow pointed to looked as if it had been raked over, like marks in a sandtrap.

The picture to the right was of a big mound of small stones, a chip gravel dump with the cottonwoods coming up out of the river bed behind it. The photographer had stood near the road, near the entrance to the drive that led back to the pile. You could see tire tracks where the chip spreaders backed up to take on gravel. In the sunlight, to the left side of the pile, stood a big front-end loader with an open control seat and a wide umbrella fixed above it for the sun. The right side of the pile was shaded. They'd taken the picture in the early afternoon. I knew the road and the way the light passed over it. Another white arrow pointed to the shady side of the chip pile. The caption read, "Where the weapon was found."

I went upstairs and put the paper on the kitchen table in front of the chair I would sit in to read it. I fixed a drink, bourbon with lots, of ice and brought the bottle with me. I read the story, eight brief paragraphs, ten or eleven times before I called my brother in L.A.

I wasn't crying. There was nothing in my voice or

breath or throat, just big drops rolling steadily down my face.

"It's happened," I said. "You won't believe it."

"You're getting married,"

"No, no, no," I said, laughing his suggestion away.

"It's stranger than that. It's Milton Weir."

There was silence for a moment, then my brother asked, "Jesus, when are you going to get off this Milton thing?"

"Just listen," I said. "You won't believe what's happened."

As I read to him from the paper, I began to see Milton, or, rather, began to make this picture of him.

He is taller by a few inches than he was. He has kept the crewcut but grown sideburns, narrow and closely trimmed, all the way down to the angle of his jaw. He stands beside the pile, thinking about the white tee-shirts his mother still buys and sends to him, even to the drilling company office in Tulsa, so that the geologists bring the packages out for him to the oilfields. He gets them in front of the men, on his birthday, or at other times, for no reason at all, and they make him open the packages next to the rig, then whistle and say what nice white tee-shirts they always are and hadn't he better try it on to see how nice it looks. He knows, though he has

only come back that afternoon, only crossed the border an hour ago, that she'll be passing here soon.

For a while he sits in the front-end loader under the umbrella, then thinks it would be anytime now and comes down to get the gun from the trunk of his car parked behind the gravel dump. He has shot it often in the oilfields at beer bottles set up for that purpose and at jack rabbits and an occasional stray tree off in the distance. He is good at it. He has not needed a scope for a long time. He has been told by a beefy man with a limp who has worked on rigs for fifteen years that they could have used him in the last war and he is certain that it's true. He has never imagined himself there, but he does feel that he would have done well. He sits down now with the rifle cradled in his lap, looking at the way his and the previous owner's sweat and skin oil have darkened the lines of the woodgrain in the stock. He thinks how, except for the greater number of trees and the hills across the way, this country where he grew up is a lot like Oklahoma, that the light is right, in the west some and behind him, that he'll get it right.

Then I imagined his mother the way I'd seen her that summer when we passed in my grandmother's car on the way to Missouri to buy fireworks. My grandmother had shaken her head and said, "That poor soul." His mother was walking it slowly, like she did in good weather seven

months of the year every year since her husband died in the courthouse furnace room. She did not like or dislike anything anymore. There was how things were supposed to be and how things were not supposed to be. There was a clean brown summer dress, well-dried on the line and well-ironed, and there were those with fold marks that some careless people wore. There were pies that were too dry in the crust, and pies where the crust stuck to the pan and made a mess of the kitchen counter when you tried to get a piece out. There were people who drove by and there were people, mostly older than herself, who would not drive anymore. There was this stretch of road and there were others, but only this stretch showed the rise of her town to the north and the courthouse dome and the spire of the First Lutheran Church to its left. She'd squint her eyes and search the skyline for the steeple, then she'd come up on the sign to remind her so often of the number, of Route 138, and that she took one hundred thirty-eight steps two hundred times from her door to the hospital, almost exactly that number there and almost exactly that number back again.

To the right, to the east, crows picked at a collapsed brown shape out in the field, and to the left, trees grew up along the river. There were men sometimes who stopped at the gravel pile in trucks and who would watch her slowly, trying to make her forget the count --

ninety-three one thirty-six, ninety-three one thirty-seven, ninety-three one thirty-eight; ninety-four one, ninety-four two, ninety-four three--they would be waiting in line to take gravel and then they would not back up to the pile and the man who loaded them would also stop to watch. They used to drive back and forth past her on the two-lane, empty and full, at first honking, but when she didn't look they wouldn't honk anymore, just stop and watch from the gravel yard. So she didn't turn her eyes to the pile when she went past. She kept them on the sign and the dome and spire beyond it, counting steps. When she came alongside the pile across the highway, she didn't see anything, hardly heard the sound of him, because her head was a heavy weight on the ground suddenly, and then for a moment she lost count and forgot everything forever.

When I looked up from the pictures, I found the telephone in my hand. My brother had hung up. The machine squawked at me and I unplugged it from the wall. If he called back, I didn't want to speak to him just then.

The newspaper still lay face up on the table, the photos cold and lifeless, gray cottonwoods, smokey clouds, two dim arrows that pointed out nothing, really. I'd put the people back in them the way I wanted the scene to look. And as I stared at the vague, grainy pictures, I

understood finally that the way I saw it couldn't have been the way the thing went at all.

Maybe before firing he stood and cursed her, his face flushed with rage. Or maybe his mother had seen him from a long way off, had smiled and turned to him when she arrived. Maybe he loved her but hated himself too much to admit it. How was I to know? I'd never even touched Milton. I'd never touched his mother and neither of them had ever touched me. Probably, I couldn't point him out at a restaurant, in a subway car, or an elevator. Certainly, he would never have recognized me. If I had stood in front of his jail cell bars or sat on the other side of the wire dividing a visitor's cage, if I'd gotten into Anamosa or whatever prison they kept him in, and looked at him and said, "I've always known it would end this way," he might have laughed if he'd been that sort. Or perhaps he'd only watch me carefully, trying to understand who I was, why I'd come.

And it was right then, too, that I finally understood how little I really knew about the incident that caused my obsession. I'd monumentalized this small act, this brief moment. A boy on a tire swing, a bit of metal speeding toward him, impact, pain, blood.

Later, I was standing in the bathroom after a shower, thinking about it again, trying not to. I dried the mist off the mirror to get a look at my glass eye. That was the

first time I ever really stopped to examine the thing, I mean, the first time I ever stopped to study it for more than half a minute.

It's a real piece of work when you get right up close and concentrate on what you see. The corona is quite close in color to my own, but from there inward things get a bit hazy. The diagonal flakes which cluster like marble toward the center of my real eye are gone completely and in the very middle, rather than a single black and gray ellipse, there is just a dark spot.

Still, when I stepped away from the mirror and dimmed the lights, I could barely tell the difference. That manmade eye wasn't bad at all. Someone, some craftsman had done a good job of making it. I tapped the back of my fingernail against it, the way Annie used to. It was real enough and it was mine.



## Do You Still Dream of Horses?

In a western town full of smoke from local forest fires, in a bar on the outskirts of that town at the mouth of a canyon through which all the smoke and all the danger of spreading has channelled itself, with all the bar's windows closed and the air conditioner running overtime and badly, with everybody irritated and tired from fighting the damn fire or its smoke, a man wearing a battered and sweatstained New York Yankees cap pulls out a pack of Lucky Strikes and lights one. A fortyish woman with puffy lowerlids and flabby upper arms turns her eyes and nostrils toward him.

At the same time, in an eastern city, with the heat and the smell of ripe dogcrap, blackened banana skins, newspaper ink and transient's piss bursting in through the doorway of a corner bar each time the door is opened, in the darkest corner of the bar, sitting directly underneath a huge air conditioning vent, a man wearing blue jeans over black leather boots, and starting his third bourbon, puts on a thin autumn coat, shakes his shoulders and rubs his arms. "Shit," he says, "it's cold in here."

Neither man is a stranger to these bars, but then neither man has ever owed either bartender money, nor could either of them expect to be given the right drink if they walked in and asked for the usual. In both cases, some fellow patrons might know what that was supposed to be, never the bartender.

"How can you smoke?" the flabby-armed woman asks the man wearing the Yankees cap. She turns to her can of cheap, regional beer, flicks the beaded condensation off it and turns back, her face surly, her lip curled upward to the right. "It's bad enough breathing that stuff out there ... you've got to smoke?"

"Do you want me to put it out?" He holds up the lit cigarette.

"Sure," she says. "I wouldn't mind that a bit."

He puts the cigarette between his lips, draws in, holds it a moment while he watches a rotating beer sign, then blows out and says, "Tough shit, this is no health club."

She turns to the other side, to a man with soot blackening his clothes and arms. "Did you hear that?" she asks. "Did you hear him?"

Big fires are burning in the west; to some people it seems that half of the forests are in flames. The reports cite giant acreages, numbers in the millions, in 3 then 4

then 5 huge western states. It is roaring and the pictures continue to come. For days and days at a time, it's the major news story on all channels. Still, only a few have felt the fire's direct heat, have sweat because of it.

Everyone else sweats directly under the sun. And they are sweating under the stars and the moon now too. The worst days the midwest from Canada to Mexico has felt in more than twenty years -- cats and dogs, chickens and pigs, old armadillos, calves, turkeys, people foolish enough to run out of gas in West Texas, others mowing lawns with the speed of draft horses in Minnesota, some small part of all these and more die every day.

Most people move only grudgingly and then not far. The rest sit inside, or on porches, or in lawn chairs and hammocks under wide shade trees. And they sit in bars, lounges, Elks Clubs, union halls and cafes; they sit in every posture of exhaustion, discomfort and disbelief they can manage, drinking and staring out somewhere.

Sometimes they stare at the television, which, in bigger towns, shows periodic weather bulletin updates. They stare at sprawling, nearly hemispheric maps, at moving radar pictures, at satellite photographs (never thinking that they are in them), all of them mesmerized by the cloud systems ranging off the shores, all of them ready for the rain.

In the eastern city, the man who has put on his coat goes to the bar and waves down the bartender. "Another?" asks the bartender.

"Hey," the man says, smiling. "It's awful cold in that corner. Think you could turn that thing down?"

"There's plenty of room. Why don't you just move?"

The bartender knows this one, from out west somewhere, not Denver or Phoenix or anything like that, some smaller place. He knows it isn't Nevada because he was in Nevada once and didn't like the people and this guy has never caused any problems, just comes in with a few others, usually the same two or three, every couple weeks or so. He doesn't want to get anything going here, especially not over a thing as simple as air conditioning. He wouldn't mind throwing some asshole drunk back out into the heat (in fact, he's surly right now and would kind of like that), but as far as he can remember this slow speaking man is not an asshole and definitely not a drunk.

The people he usually comes in with aren't there now, but the bartender likes them too. They're mostly happy and generally don't bother him, walk in together smiling and leave the same way. They tip well and regularly. He remembers the face of one of them, a woman with short hair, not spiked or anything, just very short, and she's

got deep brown eyes, speckled some like the mahogany of his old bar. When she needed another and looked around, those eyes caught him watching her. They made him feel soft in the stomach, loosened his shoulders somehow. When he'd seen this one come in, he had hoped she'd follow, make an entrance wearing a short skirt.

"Sorry, pal, I can't turn it down," he says, holding his arm toward the window. "It's 98 out there."

"It's Derek,"

"What's that?"

"It's not pal, it's Derek."

"Sure, I know that. 'Pal' is just a figure of speech, Derek, okay?"

Derek goes slowly back toward the corner, stopping for a moment at the jukebox. He looks down then shakes his head. Nothing interests him. He lifts the chair with a firm grip and such measured control that the chair looks as light and manageable as a cheap saucepan or an empty beer pitcher. Then, without a sound, he moves it from under the vent and sits.

An eighty-four year old man named Larry begins to die in a suburb of Kansas City. He is watering the lawn in his front yard, has just moved the sprinkler and is standing with his arms crossed, following the water with

his eyes, making sure some of it goes into the broken soil around the base of a cherry sapling he planted in the spring. Suddenly, the water is of no consequence to him. He is down on one knee with a deep pain in his armpit. But he cannot support even this posture and tries to steady himself with his hand. He finds his arm numb and tingling, as though he'd slept on it funny all night. He goes to both knees then rolls, almost casually, over onto his back.

The neighbor kid across the street shooting careless baskets sees this motion and wonders, is the old bastard tanning? The sprinkler, a self-moving, spiggot-headed job, goes "chit-chit-chit-chit" then chatters for an instant and starts back toward the sapling. The neighbor kid has never seen anything like this happen before. He will shoot baskets for another minute or so before going inside to tell his father what he saw. His father will check out the window, call the police and go over and find the man dead. The boy will not forget seeing this until he himself dies in a car wreck eleven years, five months later.

## II

It's Sunday and Foley, the man wearing the Yankees cap in the western bar, is waiting for some people he knows. They're carpenters like him. They plan to drive up the canyon into the thickening smoke to cut a firebreak, if necessary, around his friend Henry's cabin. He's not looking forward to this work. The air is bad enough down here in town and he's tried driving up the canyon once before during this fire. He's guessing it will be much worse now.

He hates the smoke but he's not afraid of the fire itself. He believes that some magic, some luck of numbers, protects him from physical injury...but bad air reminds him that he has willingly inhaled tobacco smoke for the past ten years. Even up there in the canyon, it would never be the heat of the fire that got him, it would be the smoke.

Foley has always prided himself on being able to pick up hot things, sawblades, hamburgers and pork chops off the grill. He has always been able to rearrange campfires by simply concentrating and being careful about where he puts his hands in the fire ring, and once, as a boy of fifteen back east, drunk at a party at a friend's house while the parents were away, Foley had tried to impress a girl, Tina James (who would never think much of him

again), by crushing her cigarette in his palm. She couldn't find an ashtray nearby. He'd just begun talking to her and didn't want to stop while she went to find one.

"Don't go," he said. "Here, just give it to me."

The actual suffocation of the cigarette's ember hadn't hurt too badly, but within a few minutes the pain came, throbbing, and after it a blister rose the size of a small stack of dimes. Foley had to play softball the next day and every time he picked up the bat or put the glove on, he cursed himself in a low voice fiercely.

Now he looks down at his hands on the bar, turns them over and studies his palms, wondering what would happen if he tried that trick again today. Of course, he tells himself, the girl still wouldn't be impressed, but it's possible not even a blister would raise now. He thinks about a place inside his hand where he might brush a cigarette out quickly.

The old scar tissue is coarse. The new scars are pink and soft and when he presses down on them they turn white for a moment until the blood returns. A flappy piece of dead skin peels easily off a recent gash to show another new scar underneath. Foley's left middle finger is almost straight, but when he lays his hands back down on the bar, not one of the others stays in line.

He has hit his fingers with mallets, with ten foot beams and with framing hammers. He has crushed them



setting windows and wrenched them with cat's paws and forty pound pry bars. The summer before, while he was framing a house, a college kid dropped a four-by-eight sheet of half-inch plywood twelve feet off a roof onto his right thumb. That time he was lucky, no breaks, and he wiggles his digits in a little dance on the bar, thinking how much he dislikes being here alone, just Foley, his fingers and his beer.

In fact, as he thinks about it, Foley realizes he hasn't felt comfortable indoors for almost three years now, not since coming to this town. There is his own place, the converted upstairs of a big old Victorian house, but when he's there he's alone, and with no one around to look at or to look back, he feels nothing but himself. What he does there matters to no one. Sleep eat read watch, sleep eat read listen, bathe bathe bathe in the old clawfoot tub, remember remember remember, so many memories that sometimes he feels dumb with them, spending hours listening to the radio or jazz tapes with his feet propped up on the kitchen table, smoking cigarettes, drinking wine or beer.

He wonders if that is better or worse than the television which twice now he has almost thrown bottles through and only stopped because of college basketball. He's sick of the TV. The people on it are not people at all and he wonders if the real people who watch TV believe

what they see and whether that's not partly the reason why he cannot really connect with anyone, because he does not talk constantly like the television. He wonders if that's what's expected of him, chatter.

He dislikes the flabby armed woman next to him at the bar. She is called Sally and he knows her better than she thinks. She drinks hard and makes conversation easily with most of the people who frequent the place. Her coarseness, her big snorting laughter, her obvious ethnic jokes do not amuse him. She has stringy dishwater-gray hair, brutish eyes and a perpetually-open mouth. With regulars around her at the bar, she will slander brooding Indian men and women about whom she knows next to nothing except for the fact that they will not strike back or even look in her direction.

Once, Foley saw her bludgeon a man from behind with a longneck beer bottle, then spit and laugh. The bottle didn't shatter as they do in the movies. There was a wooden sound, "thunk," and he went down off his stool. Another time Foley watched her wind up and hit a woman with the wide end of a pool cue because the woman took a cube of chalk from the rail on Sally's table.

If she speaks to him, which she rarely does anymore, Foley simply stares her down or snarls as he did a moment earlier about the cigarette. Foley knows that if she ever tries to hit him he will not hesitate to lay her out. Of

course, he'd rather see someone else do it, preferably an Indian, but if the occassion ever arises, he will do what he now considers the right thing, a solid forward jab between the eyes, knuckles be damned.

Foley has not heard the stories about the famous beating she received on a January night twelve years before, when she was thirty and slim and considered worth having at home in winter by four regulars in the bar. That night, sitting on the bed of her fourth choice, Donny, she told him that he was "a lousy fuck," smaller and possessing less stamina than choices one, two and three, who she then named.

Donny struck her hard in the face with a coffee table picturebook outlining the history of Ford Mustang automobiles. Her head was smashed through the livingroom window of his double-wide trailer home. She was thrown, like a haybale, by her shirt collar and belt, out into the dark, where she wandered the horse pastures Donny took care of, until the night froze the blood on her face and she lay down under an icy blue plastic tarpaulin she found caught in some barbed-wire. It is partly because she lost five toes to frostbite that night that Foley often thinks her backside going away looks like two bearcubs wrestling under a blanket.

She is almost never violent before nightfall, though Foley remembers driving by her once on the main street in

broad daylight as she stumbled after a harmless drunk. The old man had real fear in his eyes and a strand of drool waving from his lowerlip. A sound, a low groaning like a cow, came from his open mouth. Still, Sally was relentless, swinging her kingsize leather bag against his back and shoulders until he couldn't stand it any longer and dropped to a fetal position on the sidewalk.

From time to time, for safety, he glances at Sally, but mainly he keeps his eye on the door at the other end of the room, hoping Henry and Mick, his carpenter friends, will come in. It is one. They were to meet him here at noon and Foley is ready to be back outside, smoke or no smoke.

On the other side of the continent, Derek also wants to be outdoors. Alice is making him wait again. Today is the fourth time in a month that she hasn't shown up and by now, an hour and a half late, he decides she won't come at all. He is sick of it, but he can't forget for a moment the way her mouth tastes, the way her legs wrapped around his back feel, how she takes big handfuls of his hair and holds his face closer to her crotch. Derek wonders how he can consider these things never happening again. He wonders what to do and knows that he can't call because

he'll only explode into the telephone's mouthpiece when her answering machine clicks in.

He sips his bourbon and looks at the television screwed to the wall. On the screen, a DC 8 drops tons of flame retardant over a smoking forest. The scene changes to show a woman in an orange hardhat and a yellow long-sleeve shirt with a green Forest Service patch on the left shoulder. Soot forms dark rings around her eyes where she has removed her goggles. Circles of sweat expand from her armpits. A drenched purple bandana hangs loose around her neck. "We're looking at at least two weeks," she says. "This wind and heat isn't helping things any." A map of the west, from Colorado to California, from Montana to New Mexico, appears on the screen. Red spots of varying size and shape are scattered over it and Derek sees a small one some hundred miles southeast of his home town, Kalispell.

He is not worried about the fire. It could never touch Kalispell and he knows from that morning's paper that the red dot on the map represents nothing more than a few thousand acres of lightning struck forest in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Two mountain ranges, miles and miles of ranchland and the north end of a giant lake stand between the flames and his home. They are not even fighting those fires, which will burn themselves out

naturally and leave open soil for thick stands of lodgepole pine to start in.

Derek finishes his bourbon and gets up, shoving the chair backwards against the jukebox a little harder than he'd meant to. It wows out half a revolution of an old Sinatra song and a couple heads up by the door turn. The bartender and two of the patrons, a fisheyed hag in a stained floral print dress and her constant companion at the rail, a magazine vendor with a bad shake in his right arm, look back from the bar to see what's caused the noise.

"Say, Derek," the bartender calls to him. "Come on over and I'll buy you one, okay?"

"Yeah," says the hag, "yeah, kid, you come on over here too. Let's have ourselves a party."

He waves them off and goes out into the bright hazy light of Seventh Avenue. From his coatpocket he takes a pair of dark aviator glasses and puts them on. He removes his coat, hangs it in the crook of his elbow and starts on his way to Battery Park at the south end of Manhattan Island.

The street is wide here, the sun directly overhead. As he walks, Derek watches from behind his dark glasses, fixes his eyes here and there for a moment, occasionally on a single person for the entire length of time it takes to meet up with or pass them. A short man in a tweed coat

and black fedora. In the middle of all this heat, he thinks. A woman in a light yellow cotton knee length skirt whose legs Derek follows across one street all the way down the long blocks of Varick to Canal where she heads left toward Chinatown. He wonders if he can smell the fish coming down from the Chinese vendors a few blocks away and stops on the other side of Canal Street to sniff the air. He looks across to see if he can find the woman in the yellow skirt but she's been swallowed up in a stream of color, the life flowing packed onto the sidewalk of the great avenue. He continues on through Tribeca, past the warehouse district, the meat cutters and produce wholesalers, then on under the Trade Center, down the island to the old limestone gun battery and the park around it.

He is determined to keep Alice out of his mind so he sits on a bench overlooking the harbor, where he watches the sailboats, the Staten Island Ferry, the cargo ships and the big statue and tries not to think of Alice. Of course, he does think of Alice some, of the reason why he's alone at the Battery on another Sunday, but finally, after a little more than an hour of watching the ships, he dreams of where he grew up.

Derek sits with his eyes wide-open behind his sunglasses while inside his head he sees the whitecaps blowing across Big Arm Bay, sees Wild Horse Island and the

wind pushing waves from the center of Flathead Lake onto the northeastern edge of the island. He sees the green mountains rising up from the far shore and imagines the peaks of Glacier Park less than an hour's drive away. He remembers a day in this time of year when he saw his first grizzly bear, across the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, a young male standing in a huckleberry bush. He'd watched it for an hour with binoculars, followed every movement, every preened paw, each slow, calm turn of its head as the bear kept vigilance around itself.

And he remembers the second and last grizzly he saw, again, in late August, the best feeding time in the high alpine. He was more than a hundred miles south of where he'd seen the first, this time in a drainage six miles up a series of switchback trails, on Turquoise Lake, in the Mission Mountains. At the north end of the lake, water fell a thousand feet down off a glacier.

He was looking for a place to set up camp, walking through an alley formed by rounded walls of rock with deposits of soft dirt and thin grass forming a floor between them. It was a wide sunny alley because the rock wasn't fallen rock but uncovered mountain, shaped by the wind.

As he thinks about it, Derek remembers that it was the light that made the bear seem so horrible. She was a young female digging larvae at the end of one of the



corridors and when she saw him she was terrified. She stood up quickly to see what his intentions were, then sniffed the air a moment and bound past, clearing Derek by six feet or less, swiping at him once as she went. Then, when he had gotten control of himself and had just begun thinking of the best route to take over the rock wall and down ten miles to his car, the bear returned.

She stopped about thirty feet from him and balanced on two legs again. She was pissed. She didn't like being startled in a corner, especially by something this large, and her mother had taught her to let other things know how she felt, even a moose or a lion if the situation called for it.

What Derek remembers most about the moments before he scurried up the rock wall is the intelligence he saw so clearly in that daylight. Her eyes closed in on his for an instant and he could see that she was angry. It was expressed there. He never wanted to see that again. She could crush him like a cheap lawnchair, and then, she could eat him. He would never in all his life forget that face.

He remembers another time, on his uncle's ranch northeast of Arlee. A black bear stood pulling the branches of a small plum tree through its mouth. A hundred and forty yards away, a small group of horses held their noses to the ground below another tree, a giant

cottonwood. Now and then, a horse looked up, but only after the bear had cracked a branch or rustled leaves and even then the horses seemed only interested, not frightened at all.

It was August again and when he had first spotted the dark shape out of the corner of his eye, he'd begun to turn around to walk back to his uncle's house. He knew that in spite of his familiarity with black bears, in spite of this particular bear's concentration on the plums, it was a powerful, fast animal which could, if it got hold of him, spill all the guts out of his stomach in one well-placed deep slash of its claws. He had a rifle with him but it was an uncertain light and the distance between them could be covered by the bear in a matter of seconds. He might get two shots off if the bear charged him.

Still, he watched. He had never seen horses act this way. Normally they'd scurry at the sight, sound or smell of any wild animal, but not that day.

After awhile, the sun began to set and Derek could only dimly make out the bear's head as it stripped the tree. Still, he could see the horses, especially the light gray shapes, like continental maps, on an appaloosa, and the sheen of a roan as it moved carefully around to a thicker patch of grass. The appaloosa followed the roan to the greener, taller grass. They put their noses

together. The roan looked over the apaloosa's neck, first at the bear and then at Derek. It bent to the grass again and snorted.

Finally, when the bear had stripped the plums it could reach, it dropped to all four paws and took a step toward him. The bear was just a hazy black shape by then and Derek watched it carefully for a moment. It raised up and faced him directly, sniffing the air. Without hesitating, Derek aimed his rifle at a faint star and fired. When he looked down, the bear had disappeared. One of the horses, a colt, bolted up from where it had been laying near its mother, but the rest remained with their mouths in the grass. He thought nothing could move them. They were so singular, such a force of quiet in the pasture that he still holds the memory of them today, still dreams of these horses.

Derek catches himself falling asleep and pulls out of it. In front of him is New York Harbor, behind him he knows the Sunday parkgoers stroll back and forth. He hears children laughing but feels ugly and out of place. Anyone could be watching him, any transient or madman. He hates falling asleep in public in the city.

Once he fell asleep on the subway late at night and found himself in the South Bronx, a place he'd only heard stories about. Another time, in Riverside Park looking out over the Hudson, with Alice stretched out on a bench,

her head in his lap, he dozed off and woke to find two men in leather pants and sleeveless tee-shirts pointing at them, smiling with pornographic looks in their eyes.

He is tired. The heat and light of the big open harbor have left him exhausted, tired and conscious of all the other people, the hundreds of thousands of them packed in behind him, all the way up Manhattan Island.

Foley is tired too. He finishes his fifth bottle of beer. Henry and Mick are now more than two hours late. Foley has played two games of pool, has tried phoning both of their houses twice and has even talked briefly with Sally who told him that the fires burning near her home town in southern Oregon are much worse than these.

A woman comes in. Foley knows her better than he wants to. In the summer she works for the county as a flag-girl on roadcrews, but she's on loan now to the Forest Service. They have borrowed her to stand on the road leading into the mouth of the canyon and stop people to ask what business they have driving into a fire zone. She has already allowed two carloads of people from Wisconsin, which is where she's from, to drive caravan-style up into the smoke. For the past three and a half hours her mind has been figuring herself in the nearest bar and this is it.

As soon as she sees Foley, she comes straight at him.

"Hi, shithead," she says in a low, mock-seductive voice.

Her given name is Victoria but she calls herself Carrie in this town and works as a stripper in the winter at a place called Frank's. She is compact and truly fine, smooth and firm as good fruit, and when Foley mounted her they were wet out of the shower and his body slid easily against hers. He will never forget the feeling of carbonation at the base of his skull when he came. He will, however, forget her face. He has been trying to for three and a half months now and will succeed about three years later.

Foley decides that her "Hi, shithead," means he doesn't need to bother being civil so he says nothing. She sits down next to him and orders a martini. "He's buying," she says to Charlie the bartender when he returns with it. Foley looks at her drink, and says, "I'll buy her a beer if she wants one."

"You are a shit, Foley, you know that?"

She flips a ten dollar bill on the bar and lifts the drink to her lips.

From his other side, Sally with the flabby arms leans over and slobbers loudly, "Doncha letter say so, kid ...iz nunner fucking businesssss."

"Is this your old lady?" Carrie asks, smiling.

Foley gets up and starts to the bathroom. Halfway there, he realizes he's left his wallet on the bar but decides he'd look foolish if he came all the way back for it.

In the stall, he glances at himself, checking for anymore of the tiny warts Carrie had given him. For two months, he burned them slowly away with a painful solution, podophlyn, and he's been checking himself regularly for the past six weeks. He finds nothing, pees and returns to the bar.

Carrie is gone but Foley's friend Mick is sitting in her place. He's leaning over the bar, speaking into Charlie the bartender's ear. Charlie shakes his head and closes his eyes, then opens them. He sees Foley coming and stops Mick from talking. Mick swivels the stool to face Foley.

"Henry's dead," says Mick. "Electrocuted running wire in those new condos this morning with his father."

Foley sits down and stares at Mick whose eyelids are puffed out and soft. He sees the truth there in Mick's eyes and Mick turns to the bar, lays his forehead on the edge and talks into his lap.

"We have to go tell his sister."

"What? What are you talking about?" says Foley.

"Marita's at the cabin. She's been up there all

morning waiting for us. She doesn't know anything yet and we've got to go tell her."

Foley stands. He puts his wallet, which seems awfully light to him suddenly (it is completely empty now), in his back pocket and, without waiting for Mick, he starts for the door.

In Chicago, in the bottom floor of an old brownstone house two blocks from the Armitage Street el station, a woman sits in a recliner with a window fan on a kitchen chair in front of her. The wind from the fan blows directly up her dress, cooling the insides of her thighs. She is alone in the sparsely furnished house. Rats on the roof and roaches in the basement wait for nightfall. From time to time, she speaks in a voice just barely audible on the sidewalk outside her open window.

"Oh yeah," she says, "uh huh, yeah yeah, that's what they all say, um huhm, yeah, right, right, right,"

At three o'clock she screams then shouts out, "You blind bastard, you shitty little fool, go ON, see if I care, go ON..."

It's the sixth time in as many days that her voice has echoed through the buildings up and down the street. No one in the neighborhood has asked her why she screams. No one in the neighborhood knows her.

## III

When Mick and Foley arrive, they get out of Mick's truck and go right to the cabin, an old framehouse made of douglas fir. Both of them know the cabin as well as any house they've built. Last summer, with Henry and his father, an electrician, they had worked and stayed there weekends, raising the roof six feet and building a new kitchen out of the same locally milled wood that the original house had been made of seventy years before. It had been expensive, ordering the custom widths and lengths from the mill, but it had been a pleasure for all of them to spend enough time and use the right materials and tools.

As he enters the cabin, Foley can't help thinking that this may be the only place he feels comfortable inside of anymore. He knows that he shouldn't be admiring his work, that he should be thinking about what to say to Marita, but he does admire this work. He admires the space and human dimensions, the uncluttered corners of the main room extending into the open kitchen behind it. The place still smells of new lumber, mixed a little now with woodsmoke and cooking odors. Along with this changing smell, the additions are blending in naturally. It's the kind of house that wants people standing or sitting in it.



Almost instantly, he knows no one's there and turns Mick back outside.

Marita has seen them coming from a long way off. She has been sitting a mile above the cabin on a talus slope watching the progress of the fire across the drainage through binoculars. The wind contains the flames and smoke on the far side, blowing it up through the trees, higher, toward the shoulder of the opposite peak. It is spreading out of the canyon now, up toward the treeline, but in the other direction, away from Marita and her cabin.

She has run the binoculars over the landscape a while longer, to the river far below, to the mouth of the canyon and the valley outside, and then started down, guessing she'd beat them to the cabin. Several times along the way, whitetail deer burst into the trail and she'd pause, as always, to follow their backsides bobbing away.

When she reaches the rock outcrop above the clearing and the cabin, she slows down to catch her breath. She comes into the yard, waving at Mick and Foley, looking beyond them for her brother. She notices that Mick begins to come toward her quickly and that there's a look on his face she vaguely recognizes. She turns around to see if Henry might be there behind her and it is exactly then that she places the look on Mick's face.

She has seen it on Henry once, the jaw tight, the strained lips and sunken eyebrows, the eyes themselves wide-open and fierce. That day, he parked the car on the oil road and walked up the lane to their father's house, his eyes avoiding her, pretending to examine fence posts as he came. When she heard him stop by her car, she came out from changing the oil filter and got up to wipe her hands. "Mom's dead." he told her then covered her with his chest and arms.

Mick is close now, and Foley is coming up slowly behind.

"What?" Marita demands. "What is it? Who?"

"Henry is dead." says Mick.

She falls to the ground and does not move or make a sound. After a moment, Mick glances over at Foley, then goes to her and rolls her into a sitting position, saying her name as he does so.

"Marita? Marita?" He rubs and pats her shoulder.

"Marita, honey?" he asks. "Are you all right?"

She wails and shouts at the same time, "Get the fuck away from me, you bastard. If you touch me again I'll smash you!"

Mick stands up but immediately bends back down to put his hand on her shoulder. She slaps his hand away and sits up of her own will.

"I don't know what to tell you, Marita. I don't understand any of it. It was an electrical shock. He's dead. That's all I know."

Marita screams at Mick, "Shut up, shut up, get away from me," then jumps to her feet and runs across the yard to a trail which leads through the woods down to the creek. Mick is about to follow her but Foley stops him.

"Let her be alone for awhile," he says. "She won't go far."

Later, after Mick and Foley have climbed up the canyon to the beginning of the wide talus slope, after they have seen that the fire is spreading through the forest on the other side of the canyon, that the wind is blowing in a kind of whirlpool motion up the canyon toward them then straight across and over the opposite wall, after Foley and Mick have come down and set up a sprinkler on the roof in case the wind shifts, after they have talked for another twenty minutes about whether Henry would handle the situation as they were handling it, after almost two hours, Foley sets off down the trail to find Marita.

He is surprised how far she has gotten. She has run two miles to the creek and then followed it through deadfall and thick brush another mile downstream. He finds her laying on a small sandbank on her back, her face open to the gap of clear air above. Foley thinks she

might be sleeping at first, but he moves toward her slowly, brushing his boots on stones so that if she is awake, she will hear him coming.

Marita is not asleep and except for a few times when she will simply drop from exhaustion, Marita will not sleep for a week. She has been lying in this position since she arrived. She has moved her arms twice, once to tear out a willow sprout that bothered her hand and another time to smash the butt of her palm as hard as she could against her forehead.

When she first dropped down she didn't hear, twenty yards above her, the entire creek pouring through a narrow stone channel then falling six feet to make a loud hole of mixed air and water. It was a constant sound in this place, a sound she'd known all through her life, but she wasn't listening.

Instead, she lay on the sand letting disjointed pictures of Henry roll through her mind. Several times during the first hour she heard him speak and in special phrases only Henry could say. Once she heard him boom out, "Damn it, Rita!" as clear and loud as a blast from a ten guage shotgun. It was then she hit herself and began listening to the creek.

As she heard the water, she began to reconstruct what she could of her brother, starting slowly with isolated movements, working her way through complete gestures, and

on to sped-up versions of whole hours they'd spent together.

By the time Foley arrives, she is concentrating so hard on the sound of the creek that she doesn't hear him coming.

He and Henry have fished this hole several times. It has never given them the kind of fish Foley expected but he has never complained about coming here. Further downstream, not far, the creek widens into riffles and undercut banks and this place has always been worth stopping at on the way. With the calming sound of the water and the comfortable bed of sand, Foley has napped here several times. He guesses that Marita came exactly to this place, that she ran out of the yard with this sandbank in mind.

He sits beside her. He touches her arm and she pulls it away then rolls onto her stomach. He doesn't touch her again. He watches the hole and waits. After a few minutes, he feels her move and he turns.

Marita has made a pillow of her hands. She faces away from him. Her long brown hair covers her back and spills over into the sand.

It is like his own sister's hair--just one of many reasons why Foley has often thought of Marita. He begins to wonder what he would do if this was his sister now. He remembers the way his mother used to brush his sister's

hair, how at eight, nine and ten years old his sister would be made to sit on a high stool in the kitchen after bathing so that their mother could run a brush through the full length of it.

That was when he first realized his mother was insane. She'd brush Ellen's hair and call to him in the next room, "What have you been doing to your sister's hair? Where are these rat's nests coming from? Do you hear me in there with that god damned television running? Do you hear me, you lazy idiot?"

That particular time, Foley was fourteen and Ellen ten. The special interest in Ellen's hair started when she was eight. Their mother had had her uterus removed and directly upon returning from the hospital she had gone into her bedroom and would not come out. She violently refused to speak to their father when he called from his apartment in the city and would curse his name in front of the children any time she saw them that day.

After returning from school, Foley would stand in the doorway with the sandwich he'd made for her. It was warm and dark in the room and still his mother covered her head with the blanket. He'd rap a short drumbeat on the door and she'd begin speaking, her voice growing louder and louder, as though she'd been talking under the blanket all along, and the more she removed of the covers, the more audible she became.

"...and he doesn't even live here so what kind of reason does he have to call, what does he want to know? What? Do you think he cares about you or me or this house? What do you know, eight and twelve, you're still just mental midgets, just little fools, how can I even talk to you about anything..."

He'd walk quietly to the side of the bed, lay the dish with the sandwich down on her night table, then go out of the room as he'd come in, closing the door behind him. For three months his mother lay in her bed and when she finally came out on the first warm day of spring, she opened all the windows in the kitchen, washed Ellen's hair in the sink, set her on the stool and started brushing.

Now Foley knows she was mad, that the fetish she'd had for Ellen's hair had been strange, and not only to himself, but to Ellen and anyone else who ever saw her do it. And he knows from the things she's said that her mouth, tongue and vocal chords worked but her mind couldn't possibly be activating them. "Oh, look at this hair," she'd say, "look what a shambles it is. Look how you mistreat it. How can you be so cruel to such lovely hair? How? How can you?" This chattering would continue on through the brushing until she shifted her attention to Foley and then his sister would be set loose while their mother shouted absurdities about rat's nests, wasted milk,

Foley's fatness and the way they burned up all her furnace oil.

Lately, Foley had tried to explain the reasons for her actions to himself and he'd decided that what she had really needed all along was to be held. He's sure of it now. The two drastic changes, the divorce and hysterectomy, had come so close to one another that she could not look carefully at what she felt or thought and everything would just up and come out of her mouth, like loud breaths, without making sense. She needed people to help her hold it in, to give her time, to hold her tightly and lock their arms behind her back.

Foley looks at Henry's sister lying in the sand, moaning softly now, and he imagines that her mind is full and spastic, as his mother's must have been. Marita's breath comes hard, jerking and twitching her shoulders. She says "why" several times, but only faintly, and then the word "bastard" twice, so loud that sand blows from under her hands. Foley assumes she's talking about their father, the electrician, and he's right.

Marita begins shouting a list of curses into the ground and Foley lifts her by the shoulders into his arms. For a while, he squeezes her close, then loosens his hold and pats and rubs her back so that short hiccupping noises come in rhythm with his hand. He's glad to hear the



sounds, thinks of them as a recognition that she is with him and awake.

Half an hour later, she is still in his arms. Mick has attached a gravity feed from the creek to the sprinkler they set up on the roof and he's turned it on. He has made coffee. He sits under the porch roof, his feet crossed on the railing, drinking coffee, watching the sprinkler water run in drops off the edge, and she is still in Foley's arms.

Across the East River from Manhattan, in Brooklyn, less than a mile from the great stone bridge, Derek is in his apartment talking with his sister on the telephone. Her name is Margaret and when school starts in five weeks she'll be a senior at the university in Missoula. She is twenty-four and has been out of school three years, living in San Francisco, working in a photocopy store, a natural grain bakery, and then doing accounting for a motorcycle dealer. She's glad to be back in western Montana and wants her brother to move back as well.

"If you hate it so much, why don't you leave?" she says. "Come out here, you can live with me. Really, I don't know anyone down here anymore. It'd be kind of nice."

"Hell with that," Derek says. "What would I do for a living?"

"You're waiting tables now...how much do you like that?"

"I'm going to be an actor. You can't even be an actor in Montana."

"What about Seattle or San Francisco? There must be plenty of theatre companies there?"

"This place is a theatre." says Derek. "You go into the street and there are crazy people everywhere. It's the only place to study acting, I've told you that before."

There's no sound from her end of the line for a moment, then she says, "But you're a waiter,"

"Listen," he shouts back a bit louder than he'd wanted to. He calms down and says, "Look, you know as well as I do that if I move back there I'd just wind up as a waiter anyway. Or maybe even worse, in a Radio Shack or desk-clerking in some shitty motel. Here, I'm working as a waiter but I'm studying acting with people who know something about it."

"When are you coming out here to visit? You owe me one, you know? I haven't seen you in two years and I hated New York so I definitely won't be back there for at least another six or seven years or something like that."

She waits for him to speak.

"When are you coming out to visit?" she asks again.

"I don't know," he says, breathing out.

His sister lets him alone for awhile and he thinks of the Mission Range again as he had that afternoon. He looks out his window at Livingston Street, the heart of downtown Brooklyn, and remembers the realtor to whom he had given hundreds of dollars of key money. He remembers her telling him at the door downstairs before coming up to look at the apartment, "This, right here," (she made a circle with her hand) "these ten square blocks represent the largest hub of mass transportation in the world!"

The pneumatic brakes of a bus bound for Flatbush pop and hiss, then the engine roars.

"What was that?" Margaret asks.

"It was a god-damned shit-stinking bus, that's what it was. I don't even need an alarm clock. The damn things wake me up every morning at six."

"Derek," she says, "you're all worked up about this girl. It's like this everytime. Loosen up, will you?"

"She's not a girl, she's a woman."

"A divorced woman,"

"So?" he says. "How many men have you had?"

"That's got nothing to do with it. I just meant that you weren't going to marry her or anything, that's all."

Another bus pulls up just as Derek says, "I was

thinking about it," and his sister isn't sure what he's said, but she has an idea.

"It's all chemistry, Derek. It's just pheromones and endorphins," she says and waits.

"Bull," he says. "Where'd you read that crap?"

"No, it's true." she tells him. "In fact I'm gonna be studying the effects of those things in deer this fall when they're in rut."

"Look, just drop this, okay? I don't want to here anymore about rut. I used to shoot them in rut, remember? What the hell do you know about it?"

"I know a lot, you jerk. I'm reading books about it now and I'm going to be up there in the Cabinets for a month doing fieldwork. Where are you gonna be then, huhn?"

"Listen," he says. "This damn place is not going to break me. I'm sick of moving every three years. I'm not gonna do it again."

"All right, all right," she says, "but when are you coming home?"

#### IV

For three days it rains and the change in the western mountains is sudden. In the fire zones, the streams are dark. In some places the freed soil builds up between

rocks, altering the courses of smaller streams. Many trout will die of suffocation. Their bodies will float in the eddies of hundreds of western rivers. Ospreys, eagles and martens will gorge themselves this year and starve the next. The high meadows will become green, sometimes in a matter of hours. The air is washed too, becomes thinner, and everyone who lives where so much smoke has recently been will breathe in this air and mark the change and the cool smell of wet charcoal.

In two years, Foley will move further west. He'll never forget the town he lived in five years altogether. He'll move to Seattle, fall in love, an uncommon event for a man his age, and they will marry. They will not be insane over one another forever, but the memory of how they began will sustain them better than most.

One morning, sitting over coffee and the newspaper with his wife still in bed, Foley will answer the phone and learn that her father has died of a heart attack golfing in Arizona. It will strike Foley without warning. He will go to wake her and she will be found sitting up in bed, having heard him talking on the phone. She will have heard him say, "Jesus, no. When did this happen? ... How?..." and the rest of the conversation, the pauses, the shortness of her husband's replies. She'll have known within a minute what, almost exactly what, has happened,

how it, how he, a manufacturer of oriental clothing in San Francisco, ended.

Foley will simply watch his wife at first, then he'll try to hold her, but she'll reject him, push him away and sit there rigidly staring out through the bedroom window at the misty thin rain drifting in sheets over their backyard.

Later that afternoon, from the naugahide-covered swivel chair in the office of his contracting company, Foley will call his own father in New York. The conversation will last five minutes. He'll have had almost no idea what to say before calling and even less when he finally gets the old man on the phone. His father, realizing this, will ask him, "What's up, son?" and Foley will lie and say, "Nothing, just small talk, I guess."

Derek will stay in the city. He'll return to Kalispell nine times in his life. On his third trip back, he'll shoot a bull elk and give the meat to his uncle who, at that time, will really need it, will be almost starving.

He'll mount the head, a big one with broad antlers, a dozen tines and realistic glass eyes, and then ship it back to the city and hang it on the wall of his new rent-controlled apartment. This will shock some people who

come to his loft for parties. Some will be so strongly affected by the bull's head that they'll have to leave.

At a party celebrating the opening of Derek's new restaurant, a woman raised in a suburb of Boston will ask Derek, "Where did you get this?" and he'll say, "In western Montana,"

"Was it expensive?" she'll ask.

Another woman, a modern dance specialist from Toledo, will also ask him where he got it and Derek will be more specific. "In the Cabinet Mountains," he'll say this time and a smile will widen on her face. She'll look down at his hands and say, "No, I meant where did you hit it?"

"Oh," he'll laugh. "In the lung."

The woman, with short hair and a full, sharp nose, will look up at the elk's head and imagine it chewing grass, the lower jaw grinding rhythmically from side to side as the animal raises its head to the light. She'll try to imagine the place it stood just prior to the bullet's impact and never having been anywhere near the northwestern corner of Montana, she'll wrongly fill in the picture with a dry brown, open field backed by the Flatiron Range near Boulder, Colorado, where she and her company once danced.

She will not see the steam as it drifted from the bull's mouth, she won't hear its tines clacking against a rock, nor will she make the other connections--the season,

late autumn, the forage beneath the snow in the small meadow, the stream and the females which Derek knew to be off in the forest not far away. She would have done better to remember the place in northern Minnesota where her father once took her fishing. Except for the mountains and the width of the valleys, the trees, the water, the firmness of the soil would have been more like the place Derek shot the bull.

"Did it run far?" she will ask him with the scenery near Boulder, Colorado, still prominent in her mind.

He'll remember the way the elk bucked straight up out of the snow and bolted twenty feet into a dead somersault. He'll remember eviscerating the bull and finding the shattered rib and burst lung, and with his uncle at their camp later, finding the piece of lead in the left side, flattened and smooth on top, like a pebble from the river.

"Well?" the woman at the party in New York will ask Derek again. "Did it run far?"

"No, not really," Derek will say. "Not very far at all."